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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA HOSTS MINISTERIAL IN PREPARATION FOR  
ARAB-SOUTH AMERICAN SUMMIT

Classified By: AMBASSADOR E.ANTHONY WAYNE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: South American and Arab nations held a ministerial in Buenos Aires February 20-21 to prepare for their upcoming bi-regional summit in the final quarter of 2008 in Doha, Qatar. A senior MFA official assured the DCM in advance that the ministerial would be attended by moderate Arab countries and the communique was unlikely to affect U.S. interests. In fact, some criticisms of the USG (as well as Israel) did make it into the final Communique, but the GOA claimed that it managed the negotiation to take more egregious language out, an assertion that another delegation partly confirmed. Key points of the Buenos Aires Declaration included: condemnation of terrorism in all forms and linkage of terrorism to specific people or religions; reformation of the UN Security Council; resolution of the Malvinas Islands dispute; right to refuse foreign occupation and for states and peoples to resist; withdrawal of Israel to pre-1967 lines and reopening of border crossings; denouncement of "unilateral" U.S. sanctions in Syria; sovereignty of Iraq and right of non-interference in internal affairs; national reconciliation in Somalia; making the Middle East a WMD-Free Zone; reduction of trade barriers; successful conclusion of WTO Doha Round; sovereign right to exploit resources; importance of energy for sustainable development. The GOA used the occasion to announce that it will open an office in Ramallah, and that the Arab League will post a representative in Buenos Aires. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Background: South America, home to large Arab communities, has been eager to increase trade and investment with the Arab world. The two regions launched their first joint summit in Brasilia in May 2005 attended by 34 countries from South America, North Africa, and the Middle East. Since then they have held five ministerial, and seven working-level meetings to explore cooperation and closer coordination on a number of political, economic, and cultural issues. In particular, participating countries pledged to jointly seek reform of international trade, seen by many as favoring rich countries. The Brasilia Declaration also included criticism of the U.S., Israel, WTO, and European Union. Leaders expressed deep concern about the imposition of sanctions on Syria by the U.S. and declared that U.S. policy violated international law. They called on Israel to dismantle settlements in the occupied territories and withdraw to pre-1967 borders. Elimination of farm subsidies through the WTO was recommended, and the E.U. constitutional charter was criticized for listing the Falkland Islands, which Argentina claims, as a British overseas territory.

¶3. (SBU) Participants: Although the Buenos Aires meeting was billed as a ministerial, some of the 12 South American and 22 Arab member nations were represented below the

ministerial level. Prominent participants included Venezuelan FM Nicolas Maduro, Brazilian FM Celso Amorim, Arab League Secretary General Amir Moussa, Saudi FM Saud Al Faisal, FM of the Palestinian Authority Riad El Malki, Colombian FM Fernando Araujo Perdomo, and Moroccan FM Taieb Fassi Fihri.

#### Buenos Aires Declaration Highlights

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14. (SBU) Highlights of the nine-page declaration (which will soon be posted to [www.aspa.gov.ar/en/index.php](http://www.aspa.gov.ar/en/index.php)) include the following:

-- They "condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and reject any linkage between terrorism and a specific people or religion, ethnicity or culture."

-- They highlight "the importance of a comprehensive reform of the UN...support to a prompt negotiating process in the UN with respect to Security Council reform."

-- They call on Argentina and Great Britain to "resume negotiations" resolve the Malvinas/Falklands Islands dispute, and they implicitly criticize the EU for listing the islands as "territories associated to Europe" without acknowledging the sovereignty dispute.

-- "They reaffirm their refusal of illegal foreign occupation and recognize the right of states and the peoples to resist it in accordance with the principles of international legitimacy and in compliance with international humanitarian law."

-- "Lasting and comprehensive peace in the Arab-Israel

BUENOS AIR 00000259 002 OF 004

conflict" requires the "withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories up to the lines of 4 June 1967, including the occupied Syria Golan," and they call for the "dismantling of the separation Wall and all settlements including those in East Jerusalem, and call upon the international community to resume assistance to the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people."

-- They express "deep concern about the situation in Gaza and call for the immediate reopening of the crossings between Gaza and Israel."

-- They express "deep concern with regard to unilateral sanctions imposed on Syria by the government of the United States of America and consider that the so-called Syria Accountability Act violates principles of International Law and constitutes a violation of the objectives and principles in the UN Charter thereby setting a serious precedent as regards dealing with independent states."

-- They reaffirm "the need for the unity, freedom, sovereignty and independence of Iraq and the right of non-interference in its internal affairs."

-- On the Darfur crisis, they welcome "Sudan government's acceptance of UNSCR 1769, and its effort in cooperating with the UN/AU Hybrid operation. They welcome the measures taken to implement the comprehensive peace treaty between the government of Sudan and the Sudan people's Liberation Army (SPLA) signed in Nairobi."

-- They reaffirm "that regional security and stability in the Middle East require that the whole region be free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD Free Zone)... They reaffirm the importance of the accession of all countries of the region without exception to the NPT and the placement of all their nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards."

-- They recall that "states have the sovereign right to

exploit their resources pursuant to their own laws and developmental policies. Within this context, they condemn any intimidatory actions against Venezuela or any other country which may affect its economic and social development and its cooperation with the countries of the South."

Follow-up  
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¶5. (U) In the last quarter of 2008, Qatar will host the second ASPA Summit in Doha. An open-ended working group will be set up composed of the Troika countries, the two Secretariats, and other interested countries to prepare a

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plan of action to be submitted to the Summit in Qatar.

¶6. (U) Argentina used the Ministerial to announce that within sixty days it will open a diplomatic office in Ramallah (Palestine). The Arab League will reopen its representation in Buenos Aires.

MFA Read-out  
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¶7. (C) Argentine MFA officials from the Bureau for North Africa and Middle East Affairs provided an overwhelmingly positive read-out on the summit. As host nation and conference organizers, the MFA was quite pleased with the number of countries that participated and the high-ranking officials sent as representatives. The MFA generally acknowledged some difficulties when deliberations on the ASPA declaration turned to the particular interests of some countries. In those instances, Argentine representatives turned to both the initial 2005 ASPA declaration and accepted UN texts as the standards for language in this summit's declaration. MFA reps tell us that Argentina used pre-existing language to limit more harshly-worded proposals and to minimize criticism of Israel and the United States.

¶8. (C) The MFA officials named the economic and cultural arenas as the two most successful areas of the summit, highlighting the Arab-South American Library, the virtual library website and the South American Research Institute in Morocco as examples of progress. The officials were also pleased with the success of discussions on technical cooperation between the regions, particularly in the fields of agricultural, energy and environmental expertise. Unlike

BUENOS AIR 00000259 003 OF 004

their Brazilian counterparts (see paragraph 12), the Argentine officials highly valued the political significance of the summit, especially for creating personal links among the representatives. The officials named political will as a critical component to sustain the ASPA initiative.

¶9. (C) In response to specific concerns expressed by poloffs, MFA officials claimed that the declaration conformed to the extent possible to the prior assurances made by Amb. Vicente Espeche-Gil (U/S for Bilateral Affairs) to the DCM (see para 1). In particular, the officials said that criticisms of the United States and Israel resulted from pressure from countries with specific interests and Argentina worked to minimize and limit the comments to the parameters of the 2005 ASPA declaration. Syria requested the text regarding the Syria Accountability Act (Paragraph 18 of the declaration) and achieved consensus on this point, but the officials could not explain how the Accountability Act violated principles of international law. Similarly, the officials offered no further explanation regarding the meaning of "illegal foreign occupation" in paragraph 15 of the declaration. Argentina was very satisfied with paragraph 13 on "Question of the Malvinas Islands" and considered the text to be standard international language.

¶10. (C) The MFA officials noted no reaction to the February 2008 ASPA declaration from the Israeli Embassy in Argentina and they did not anticipate a future reaction. Israel engaged the MFA after the 2005 declaration to request that Israel's perspective receive fair consideration and representation in the text, but Israel later recognized the 2005 text. The officials assessed that the similarity of the language used in the 2008 declaration would forestall a negative reaction from the Israeli Government, although not from the local Jewish community in Argentina. The officials also clarified that Argentina first announced in 2005 its intention to open diplomatic representation in Ramallah. In light of a renewed diplomatic push for the peace process in the wake of the 2007 Annapolis Conference and a more permissive situation on the ground, Argentina plans to implement this intention in 2008.

#### Local Diplomatic Perspectives on the Bs. As. Declaration

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¶11. (C) A Chilean Embassy participant described the meeting as interesting and entertaining, highlighting the difference between the foci and approaches of the Latin American delegates vice their Arab counterparts in this diplomatic initiative. Chile aims to keep the forum as a cooperative and collaborative process, while limiting criticism of Israel in an increasingly political forum. The Chilean official noted the reticence of Mideast counterparts during the Ministerial to include a statement on biofuels. Brazil's insistence led to the inclusion of biofuels in the Buenos Aires Declaration. The official also noted a Venezuelan motion to single out the US company Exxon-Mobil for condemnation due to a discrepancy between Petroleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA) and Exxon-Mobil in assessing the value of Exxon's assets in Venezuela. Chile disagreed with singling out one company in the Declaration and worked with Brazil and Argentina to soften Venezuela's proposed rhetoric. Venezuela brought in the President of PDVSA in Argentina to give a presentation on the issue, but Venezuelan representatives left satisfied with a general paragraph concerning the sovereignty of a country over its natural resources. Separately, Chile planned to assist Argentina in opening its diplomatic representation in Ramallah, Palestine, since Chile already had representation there. The official highlighted the participation and leadership of the Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister and the Arab League Secretary General.

¶12. (C) A Brazilian Embassy participant also noted the difficulty of negotiating in an environment in which the Venezuelan and Arab delegations pushed predominantly political agendas. Arab delegations, despite notable differences among their delegations, pushed a host of proposals regarding Israel and Mideast political issues. Venezuela pursued a similarly politicized agenda on bio-fuels and social proposals that the Brazilians found inappropriate, while also favoring most Arab proposals on political issues. The Brazilian official singularly highlighted the Sudanese delegation for its similarity to South American delegations in their desire to focus on pragmatic issues and to minimize the politicization of the forum. Brazil continued to envision ASPA as a practical forum that should not supplant

BUENOS AIR 00000259 004 OF 004

established international fora such as the United Nations and the IAEA to discuss sensitive topics including the Mideast peace process, the situation in Lebanon and nuclear matters.

¶13. (C) According to the Brazilian diplomat, his country worked with Argentina, Chile, and Peru to keep the forum a pragmatic arena to bring together the two regions, often returning to the original text of the 2005 ASPA declaration to refocus the discussion. He said the GOA was somewhat more sympathetic to political appeals due to its overriding desire to get the Malvinas issue included in the declaration. At times, the negotiation was quite difficult and the first

day,s deliberations lasted until midnight. The South American countries submitted joint proposed text well in advance of the conference, but only received the Arab proposal one business day before the conference. As such, the opening plenary session immediately broke for the two regions to meet separately and to review the other region,s proposals. These sessions led to redaction committees to merge the proposals.

¶14. (C) The Brazilian FM primarily focused on using the occasion to pursue bilateral meetings with both South American and Arab delegations. The Brazilian official estimated that the Minister spent 80 percent of the conference,s final two days in bilateral consultations. These bilateral consultations covered a range of issues including energy and country-specific concerns, such as the arrest of a Brazilian citizen in Lebanon, and Brazil found these meetings to be the most useful part of the conference. The official envisioned ASPA,s next round at Doha would result in a similarly challenging negotiation for the Latin American countries and a longer, denser declaration.

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